



TITLE:

<Book Reviews> Jianxiong Ma. The Lahu Minority in Southwest China: A Response to Ethnic Marginalization on the Frontier. Oxon: Routledge, 2013, xvii+254p.

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CITATION:

HORIE, Mio. <Book Reviews> Jianxiong Ma. The Lahu Minority in Southwest China: A Response to Ethnic Marginalization on the Frontier. Oxon: Routledge, 2013, xvii+254p.. Southeast Asian Studies 2013, 2(3): 629-633

ISSUE DATE:

2013-12

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/180010>

RIGHT:

overlap in the content in many chapters. For example, in Part Two, the life and work of Patani's *ulama*, Shaykh Dawd Al-Fatani, is discussed in both Azra and Numan's chapters. Even though both chapters have a slightly different framework, they reach similar conclusions about the role of *ulama* and their network. In Part Four, Walker and Mansurnoor both focus on the historiographies of Patani by Patani nationalists and offer similar remarks on Patani's changing national identity from secular to Islamic and Middle East-oriented. Yet, only their terminology differs: Walker uses the term "Islam-Malay Patanian nation" (p. 185), while Mansurnoor uses "Patani *Jawi* nation" (p. 276). The unevenness of topics is also noticeable. Stories about the rise and fall of Patani and its female rulers written in *Hikayat Patani* are repeatedly discussed in many chapters, while the history of Patani in the crucial period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are discussed in only two chapters in Part Two.

Overall, this book is a valuable collection that deepens and broadens the existing knowledge and public consciousness of the history of southern Thailand. Ethno-religious conflict between Thai Buddhists and Malay Muslims still continues, as does historical writing. However, as Jory notes, history does not necessarily have to determine Patani's destiny. At the same time, history should not be hijacked by any one group to serve its political or religious objectives.

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## ***The Lahu Minority in Southwest China: A Response to Ethnic Marginalization on the Frontier***

JIANXIONG MA

Oxon: Routledge, 2013, xvii+254 p.

Ever since economic liberalization in the 1980s, modernization and policies that deal with ethnic minorities have become important issues in the study of present day China. Since the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party, ethnic diversity in Southwest China has been a major component in ethnic policy, and therefore ethnic issues in this area have drawn much academic interest. Most of the existing studies about minority groups in Southwest China focus on state

construction of ethnic categories, representations of identity, and the politics of cultural discourses on ethnicity (e.g. Schein 2000; Harrell 1995), while only a few works have provided detailed anthropological data about what happens in the everyday lives of the people. This book focuses on the daily experiences of ethnic minorities to highlight the pressures they face as they deal with the challenges brought about by modernization and marketization. In doing so, it aims to explain the social and cultural mechanisms of ethnic marginalization in China, a result of the long-term pressure brought to bear on minorities by mainstream Han societies. With ample data from long-term fieldwork among the Lahu people, Ma Jianxiong vividly describes and analyzes Lahu lives on the frontier that have hitherto been inaccessible.

The book consists of eight chapters, including an introduction and concluding remarks. Covering a wide range of topics and contents, it discusses the relationships between ethnic minorities and the Han majority and their identity formation.

In the introduction, Ma briefly explains the identity-building process of the Lahu. He argues that Lahu identity is constantly generated through their relationship with the state or the Han majority. Along with contact with Han migrants in the eighteenth century, Mahayana Buddhism was introduced to the Lahu area and combined with the worldview of the Lahu and subsequently became the "E sha Buddha religious movement." This movement was seen as a form of resistance to the state and was destroyed by the Qing army. Chapter two follows the history of changing ethnic relationships between the Han and the Lahu since the 1920s when Han migrants first came to his field site. Through policies such as the creation of People's Communes and the Cultural Revolution itself, the Lahu belief system was repeatedly undermined. Subsequently, after the revival of the market economy in the 1980s, Han cadres and businessmen "hijacked" representatives of the Lahu.

Chapter three discusses the supernatural world and belief system of the Lahu. With ample citation from mythological tales and case studies, the author shows the cyclical nature of the cosmic view of the Lahu, and the traffic between the world of the dead and world of the living. There are various actors that mediate between the two worlds, such as dead parents, numerous spirits and carnivorous spirits. Everyday life is full of tension because of these actors, and the author claims that their rituals are "self-negation rituals" (p. 96) because issues that arise with such actors are considered a result of their own personal wrongdoings. As such, these rituals are a cultural response to long-term external pressure.

Chapter four deals with the Lahu kinship system. From detailed case studies of division of land upon marriage, Ma meticulously illustrates the bilateral and non-hierarchical kinship system. He states that because the kinship system lacks an internal mechanism of collective cohesion, the Lahu needed political and religious authority from outside their community such as that provided by E sha Buddha to forge unity against historical Qing state power. This authority has now disappeared and is exacerbated by an absence of representatives among the Lahu, becoming more

problematic since 1958 when all religious activities were banned.

Chapter six merits being dealt with before five and seven which are both closely related. It deals with poverty reduction and education and concerns itself with a government project for frontier people and its effects on their daily lives. Since local government revenue in Lan County can only cover a small portion of the county expenses, various kinds of funding from higher-level governments have become a fundamental resource for maintaining the administrative system. Villagers are forced to cooperate with cadres or teachers and to prepare for endless inspections. These projects and education become, as Ma puts it, a demonstration of a kind of ethnic dichotomy between “the advanced Han” and “the backward Lahu.”

Chapters five and seven deal with the Lahu people’s responses to pressure and marginalization by the Han. Chapter five, “To Become Wives of the Han,” is about women’s escape from their homeland or even at times Lahu identity. Since the 1980s, the ratio imbalance between the sexes at birth has continued in rural China and therefore many Lahu women have married Han men outside Yunnan through brokering networks. This is because these brokers, and even local Han cadres, repeatedly emphasized the discourse of “leaving is better,” thereby reinforcing the dichotomy between the “advanced Han” and “backward Lahu.” Chapter seven focuses on the responses to this situation among young Lahu men. Alongside women’s departures, young Lahu men face difficulties in finding spouses and hence they “escape” to the world of the dead. This is the reason for the high rate of suicide among Lahu people in Lan County. Ma points out that the suicides and departures resulted from pressure in their daily lives and “the pain of being Lahu.” Ma concludes with a discussion of how the dual discourse of the Han and the Lahu is strengthened through daily tensions.

This book is based on fieldwork of more than 15 years. It is indeed rare for researchers to conduct such long-term research in Yunnan’s borderlands, so the data and insights are valuable in themselves. Because of his bottom-up perspective, we can learn about the experiences of the Lahu and observe the changes that the Lahu value system has undergone over the years. Monographs on the Lahu in China are far fewer compared to those on the Lahu in Thailand, so this book is an important scholarly resource. The detailed descriptions are very engaging and Ma’s conscious efforts to incorporate historical considerations render his contribution even more valuable. Much of the current discussions about ethnic minorities in China have concentrated on ethnic formation after the communist party. This book persuasively shows how Lahu ethnic identity took shape through their encounters with the Han. This is in sharp contrast to another ethnographic work on the Chinese Lahu, Du Shanshan’s *Chopsticks Only Work in Pairs*, which is about Lahu gender unity and egalitarianism (2003). She vividly discusses the notion of gender but pays little attention to historical aspects of identity formation. Ma’s book supplements Du Shanshan’s work by citing many valuable sources.

Although the book is a valuable contribution, some points should be raised for further discus-

sion. First of all, I would like to draw attention to literature on the Lahu in Thailand, most of which is not currently available in English. Ma emphasizes the contrasting conditions in China and Thailand: E sha belief is well practiced in Thailand and social problems are seldom found. However, Nishimoto Yoichi (2000) has shown that a narrative of inferiority exists as well among Christian Lahu in Thailand who have been marginalized through complex border politics. Furthermore, Kataoka Tatsuki's (2007) discussion of Christianity among the Lahu highlights the characteristics of Lahu religion, centering on the coexistence of monotheism and animism, and the history of several charismatic religious movements. These were not always one-way processes, but rather a religious vacillation between monotheism and animism. By taking these studies into consideration, Ma's research can be placed in the continuum of such dynamic religious movements. As an aspiring researcher of Lahu people, I hope that there will be more communication across language barriers among Lahu scholars in the near future.

The second point concerns the description of the marginalization process. In spite of a wide variety of data, all the chapter conclusions culminate in "marginalization by the Han," as if it were a pre-established fact. In fact, some of the practices described may not necessarily be interpreted as marginalization. For example, Ma interprets the practices related to the *ne* spirits as a "self-negation ritual" resulting from marginalization. His reasoning is that the ritual appeared in Ban village only after the loss of their charismatic "E sha Buddha" and since then they believed their sickness or misfortune was due to their own wrongdoings, as a result of which their dead parents let *ne* spirits bite their children as punishment. Are "self-negation" and "marginalization" the only interpretations possible? One can argue, for example, that the phenomenon can be understood as a way of thinking about reasons for misfortune. Even if E sha Buddha were not destroyed by the state, personal misfortune can be explained as a result of one's own wrongdoings such as impiety towards E sha Buddha. While this is a way of explaining misfortune by personal "wrongdoings," it does not have to be seen as "self-negation." Certainly the Lahu are a marginalized ethnic group in China, but the author seems to be too hasty in overemphasizing their marginalization as an explanatory factor.

Finally, I would like to question the way the author repeatedly emphasizes the difference between "native Lahu" and "Lahu-minded Han." It is not clear what is Lahu-ness or Han-ness. The relationship between culture and ethnicity has been much discussed in mainland Southeast Asia (Moerman 1965; Keyes 1992), and scholarship has repeatedly questioned the assumptions of ethnic essentialism. Since the arrival of the Han, there have been many inter-ethnic marriages between the Lahu and the Han in Lan County over 200 years, and the differences between the Lahu and the Han are, in many situations, blurred. In my own field site, many Lahu farmers said that in ancient times they had been Han and migrated from the North, but now they have become Lahu through inter-marriage, changing customs and practices. Would such villagers be categorized as "Lahu-minded Han" or "Lahu of Han origin"? Ma emphasizes the contrast between two ethnic-

ities so as to illustrate the marginalization by one over another, but at the cost of neglecting the dynamic relationships that obtain between the two. Of course there is oppression and marginalization. But in everyday life the Lahu and the Han are inevitably related and have to interact with each other. In some situations the narrative of differences would have to be seen as strategies in themselves. Had Ma been able to illustrate the ties and interaction between them alongside the differences, without reducing these ties to the issue of “marginalization,” the wealth of field data could have been used even more persuasively.

Although I have pointed out some issues in the author’s interpretation of his data, I certainly agree that there are many tensions and problems in the local politics of many minority areas in modern day China. This book employs a bottom-up perspective to issue an important warning against serious future ethnic destruction. At the same time, it shows how ethnic identity is constituted through historical processes. *The Lahu Minority in Southwest China* is an important contribution towards the understanding of the complex politics of ethnic formation in southwest China.

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